

REFLECTIONS on the late extraordinary Events
of Providence, and the proper Influence they
ought to have on Man.

A

S E R M O N

OCCASION'D BY THE LATE

P U B L I C K F A S T,

On *FRIDAY, FEB. 6, 1756,*

R P R E A C H ' D B Y

ROBERT HARDING, Cl. M.A.

*Vicar of Potterspury, in Northamptonshire, and Chaplain
to his Grace the Duke of Grafton.*

N O R T H A M P T O N:

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To the Most Noble

C H A R L E S,

D U K E of G R A F T O N,

T H I S

S E R M O N

Is humbly inscrib'd,

In Testimony of Gratitude,

By his GRACE's

Most Dutiful and Obedient Servant,

ROBERT HARDING.



P S A L M XVIII. 7.

The earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because HE was wroth.

IT is but a very few Years since we met together in this Place to lament the Miseries of War, and to humble ourselves for the manifold Sins and Impieties of these Kingdoms, which brought down that and another severe Scourge upon us; a raging Distemper among the Beasts of the Field, essentially necessary to the Well-being of Man, still remaining, and still to be bewail'd. And now, it hath pleas'd God, *in whose hands are all the corners of the earth*, by whose Power the very Foundations of the Hills shake, and the Sea is remov'd out of its Place, to bring upon the World the *Year of its Visitation*, and to give us another sad Occasion for our Fasting and Humiliation, by very fatal Events of Earthquakes, that have been shew'd forth in an amazing Manner, even towards the Ends of the Earth; reaching with a tremendous Extent from Side to Side of the reeling Globe, and laying waste large Cities and Towns; surfeiting, as it were, the Bowels of the gaping Earth with the Bodies of Thousands of its Inhabitants, gone down alive into a dreadful Grave.

THUS the Earth moved exceedingly, and *reeled to and fro*, as if weary of her Peoples Transgression, heavy upon her, and, as saith the Prophet *, breaking down, with the Burden of her Vices, *to fall, and not rise again*. Upon the Earth Distress of Nations, with Perplexity, the Sea swelling and the Waves roaring; *Mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming upon them*. Inanimate Beings appear hurl'd into Ruins; and Nature, wreck'd with the outrageous Sins of Men, seems in Agonies for her God, and ready to expire and pass away. *The earth shook and trembled, the very foundations of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.*

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* Isa. xxiv. 20.]

IN Prosecution of which Subject I shall,

First, OFFER some Reflections, naturally arising, on such extraordinary and surprising Events. And then,

Secondly, BEG Leave to recommend to your Attention the proper Influence that such uncommon Interpositions of Providence ought to have on Man.

I. OFFER some Reflections, naturally arising, on such extraordinary and surprising Events.

THE Devastations occasion'd by such calamitous Accidents form an amazing Scene. The subterraneous Tremors and Thunder*, the Ground heaving and swelling like a rolling Sea; People unable to keep on their Legs on the vibrating Earth; Houses leaping from their Foundations; Fear and Confusion, Terror and Dismay on every Face; the Groans and Tears and Prayers of Multitudes crush'd to Death in the Ruins of falling Buildings, and others burning alive in the Conflagration of their City, do all conspire to exhibit a most moving Image, and cause Humanity to shudder: While others, whom the Violence of the Earthquake and the Flames spar'd, had a deep Share in the fatal Tragedy, perishing by cruel and barbarous Wretches, who, more merciless and unrelenting than these severe Inflictions, most inhumanly imbrued their wicked Hands in the innocent Blood of the Inhabitants, and that for the execrable Love of lawless Gain †; all which shocking Circumstances, duly consider'd, present so dismal a Scene of Horror and Misery as is not in Language to express or Imagination to conceive.

RELIGION and Humanity burst forth into Tears, and feel, with the tenderest Compassion, the grievous Afflictions that, in the merciful Intention of Providence, are sent to put us upon a faithful Search into and Trial of all our Ways; to explore the guilty Cause of Punishment; to lead up our Thoughts to the Supreme Inflicter; to reduce our erring Steps

* *Quid enim, ait Plinius, aliud est in terra tremor, quam in nube tonitru?* And in *Philosoph. Transactions*, No. 202.

† *Amor seleratus habendi.*

Steps into the Ways of Wisdom, and thence learn to fear and adore the Almighty Hand that is lifted up against us. For, as the Fear and Apprehension of Punishment is, in all Cases, one of the most moving Principles; so, consequently, the Exertion of the Terrors of the Divine Majesty is the most effectual Means to beget and preserve, in the Minds of Men, a Reverence and Awe of God, and engage their Obedience to his Laws. Such Signals from the King of Heaven, and so wide-wasting Destructions in the Christian and Heathen World, are not only the Messengers of his Wrath, sent to stir Men up to a timely Repentance, but likewise a collateral Proof of the Truth and Divinity of Prophecy, as contain'd in the Books of the Old and New Testament; which seems perfectly to delineate parallel Judgments in the Latter Days, and to be hereby receiving, in the abstruse³ Parts of it, a gradual Illustration and Completion. Nor is the Use and Intent of these vindictive Strokes only to do Justice to his own Honour, and rescue his Laws from Contempt, but likewise to discover the Vanity and Emptiness of all Things here below, and to challenge and revive his Claim and Right to the Government of all the Powers of Nature, and the Powers of Mankind.

A RIGHT this, which, tho' unquestionably God's own, is yet, by the Reasoners of this World, unhappily impeach'd and denied. For as truly wonderful as the late Phænomena, and the Cause of them are, they are not without an Hypothesis ready at hand, and suitable to their Wishes, to solve them all without the Concurrence of the Divine Agency; *that is to say*, a Knack of elucidating natural Events by ^{and to alter} natural and necessary Causes, without ever engaging an All-wise and ^{or suspend} Intelligent Cause in the Trouble, Wonderful Sagacity and Politeness ^{The generall} of interposing in the Government and Direction of the Powers of ^{Laws of it so} Nature. Tho', as it is God alone that made the World, it can't, sure, ^{as shall be most} be unworthy of him to direct, take care of, and govern it. ^{Subservient} And to ^{to his all wise,} advance any thing to the contrary, is so great an Absurdity, that it ^{purposes} ought to be his'd out of the World of rational Beings.

BUT thus do the Men of Reason blindly err, in attempting to explain, by meer Natural or Second Causes, Events that will remain for ever unsearchable, without introducing into their System a Deity; even the God of Nature, ^{at whose Command} the invisible Stores of all Nature, and all Things, but rebellious Man, bow and obey.

THE very Heathens of Old will rise up against such Men, and condemn them. For the antient Deists among them maintain'd a higher Honour and Reverence of God and Religion, and, in their surprising and calamitous Accidents, forgot not a Holy Avenger; but wisely had Recourse, for the Solution of them, to more than natural Causes *. While we, it seems, blest with a Race of modern Sciolists, are taught to account for every signal Judgment by natural Causes, even the Deluge, and the Overthrow of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*. But know, O vain Man, that God does and will challenge the Execution of his Justice to Himself, to exalt his own Attributes, not only in the last Day, but in his Judgments here in this World. *Shall there*, says the Prophet †, *be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?* That is, any extraordinary and calamitous Event, without the Hand of God in it. When God pleases to punish for Sin, the Display of his Justice is as consonant to his Nature now, as it will be at the Consummation of all Things. He has Power to save, and He has Power to destroy. And to this Purpose all Causes whatever are under his Care, and at his Service; and at his Appointment they traverse the various Parts of the Earth, in any Direction, and at any Time, for the Punishment of impious Man, and to awaken a guilty World to Righteousness.

NATURAL Causes, indeed, are the Armies of the Living God, wonderfully rais'd on all or any of the Elements; and, at different Periods of Time, and upon extraordinary Occasions, set in terrible Array, to vindicate his injur'd Honour, and summon Man to Repentance. And his Judgments, in the Instances before us, are so contriv'd as to be demonstrative Proofs of his immediate Interposition in the Laws of Nature, directing and ordering them in such a Manner as to make it impossible for considering Men to mistake the true Author, and so as that all, who look on, and reflect, may be ready to say, *This is thy Hand, and thou, Lord, hast done it* ||. And this leads me,

II. To

* *Xiphil.* in *Epit. Dion in Tito*, p. 227. And *Herodian* in *Commod. Hist. l. i.* p. 22.

† *Amos* iii. 6.

|| *Psalm cix. 27.*

II. To beg Leave to recommend to your Attention the proper Influence that such extraordinary Events of Providence ought to have upon us.

AND what wiser and safer Method can Man take in the Day of Distress and Anguish, than seriously to review his past Life? Especially, we of these Kingdoms, when the Divine Judgments are in all the Earth, and ourselves in the nicest and most important Situation with respect both to God and Man. Religion struggling with Blasphemy and Infidelity, so as justly to provoke the Anger of Heaven. Mighty Earthquakes, very dreadful in other Countries, and felt, tho' in Mercy hitherto, in this. An unusual Distemper continuing in some Places, and raging anew in others, among the Beasts of the Field, given for our Provision and Nourishment; and, moreover, the Sword of War pointed angrily at us by a potent and inveterate Enemy, whose Defeat or Success, at this Juncture, will eminently lead to the Glory or the Ruin of all our Religious and Civil Liberties.

WHATEVER Arguments, therefore, can be conceiv'd to bring Men to a Sense of their own and others Misfortunes, or excite in them a proper Dread of God's Power and Resentment, as the Cause of them, or quicken in them earnest Supplications to the Throne of Heaven for Mercy, they do all concur in the mournful Occasion of this Day's Solemnity.

SUCH Events are a startling Summons to National and Universal Amendment. They loudly proclaim the dangerous State of Nations persisting in their Sins, and the inevitable Ruin of an impenitent People in this World; which is the only Place where Rewards and Punishments, as to Mens' Civil Capacities, and as Members of Communities, can possibly be dispens'd. Societies, in their respective Relations, are the most peculiar Objects of Judgments or Mercies, and the most remarkably accountable for both. For, tho' the Neglect and Contempt of God and his Laws imply a high Degree of Provocation, yet much more flagrant is the Guilt when the Contagion becomes universal.

WHEN One considers this, and at the same Time reflects on the State of the Moral World, how intirely irregular and disorderly it is, how deprav'd the Wills and Practices of Men are, how little the Rules of Morality are observ'd, tho' as essential to the Well-Being of Society as the Laws of Motion are to the Oeconomy and Order of Nature; how can one but deplore the melancholy Scene, and fear some remarkable Vengeance, unless happily obviated by a speedy and universal Reformation. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,* (a) saith HE, to whom *all power in Heaven and Earth is given,* (b) and who is, finally, to be the Judge of all Men.

GOD is not a Being of a vindictive Nature; He delights not to grieve and afflict his Creatures: His Corrections, in their true Signification, are Instances of the kindest and most Parental Intentions: And, to this Purpose, He addresses Himself to every Faculty and Power of our Souls. He speaks to Man sleeping and waking. He speaks to him in Company and in Solitude. He intreats him to be fav'd, and even condescends to become a Supplicant to his Creature, and to court the Workmanship of his own Hands. *Lord! what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou so regardest him?* (c) Thou addressest him by the various Dispensations of thy Providence; by all Events and Accidents whatever, by Judgments as well as Mercies; by the Diurnal Revolutions of Nature, and by most alarming Appearances in the Heavens, and in the Earth, and in all deep Places.

THE Volume of Nature opens to Man a Lecture of Divinity, and every the minutest Insect preaches to him a Homily of Adoration and Worship. But the Holy Scriptures supply him with far more noble and powerful Motives to Duty, variously inculcated by the Prophets in the Old Testament, by CHRIST and his Apostles in the New, and by his Ministers from Age to Age. Thus indulgent is our good and gracious God. But when the harden'd Sinner turns a deaf Ear to these more silent Overtures and Invitations of *Scripture* and of *Nature*; then God speaks to him in his Wrath, and vexes him in his sore Displeasure; to rouse the Inconsiderate and Presumptuous, to give a Check to finish'd

(a) Luke xiii. 5. (b) Luke xxviii. 18. (c) Ps. viii. 4.

finish'd Libertinism, and strike a Terror upon all by some signal Marks of His Indignation.*

WHO can sufficiently deplore the Guilt, and detest the fatal Influence of those Vices which thus force God, as it were, to set his Terrors in Array against Mankind, and caused Him to cut off so many People, without the Reprieve of one Moment, or being allow'd so much Breath as to say a departing *Lord have Mercy upon us!* A dreadful Warning to us all, that there is no Dallying with Repentance, no Trifling with an incensed God ! For all the Elements will war under Him, and be ready, at his Divine Command, to make us miserable here, as well as hereafter.

UPON the Whole, Repentance is the only Method to make our Prayers available with God. Broken and contrite Hearts are a Present to Him better than whole *Hecatombs*; and nothing can be so grateful a Sacrifice upon his Altar, as the Sin of our Souls. Such an Offering will effectually procure Forgiveness to ourselves, and to the whole Community of which we are Members. And as the Nations around us have drunk deep of the Cup of his Fury, let it be our Care to repent, and turn to God, lest a worse Thing come upon us. The Lord hath stretched forth his Hand, and visits in amazing Earthquakes, and the Sound of War. And He can find out greater and soror Punishments for the Presumptuous and Incorrigible. He can at once let loose the Fury of all the united Powers of Nature. He can unbridle the Passions of Men, and cast Ambition, as a Firebrand, among the Nations; suffering Perfidy and Tyranny to be glutted with Blood, and lay waste the World. † He can suffer us to fall into the Hands of our Enemies; a too prevailing Force, made religiously cruel and insidious by the Spirit of *Jesuitism*.

C 2

SHOULD

* *Nunquam Dei meminerunt, nisi dum in malis.* They seldom remember'd God, but when they were afraid of Him. *Lactan.* I. ii. c. 11. speaking of the *Romans*.

† The Conduct of the *French* towards *Great-Britain*, at this Day, is a striking Image of the terrible Effects of the Arbitrary Power of the *Athenians*, and their cruel Invasion of the Rights and Liberties of their Neighbours, the *Lacedæmonians*; as finely display'd by *Thucydides* in his celebrated History of the *Peloponnesian War*.

SHOULD we not, therefore, put on the whole Armour of God, that we may be able to defeat the Craft and Subtilty of Man, appease the Wrath of God, and shun the fatal Captivity of our Sins? For these, after all, are the most dangerous Enemies we have: These are in close Conspiracy against us; and, even now, when we should abound in the Duties of the Penitent, are striving hard to undo us. Formidable, indeed, are their Numbers, and heinous enough to ruin any Nation.

IT would be endless, as well as unpleasant, to enter into Particulars: But is it not evident, that the capital and ruling Sins of this Nation are INFIDELITY and an ABUSE of SUNDAY; that Day, which is not our's, but God's. These are the two fruitful Sources of all the Disorder and Sin so prevalent among us. Hence a general Relaxation of all Obligations of Holiness and Obedience whatsoever: Hence* Perjury, Forgery, and Bribery, and every Species of Villany: Hence the allowing corrupt Nature whatever she calls for or requires: Hence a violent Attachment to Pleasures criminal in their Nature, and baneful in their Consequences; that, if persisted in, will terminate in the Ruin and Infamy of a People, unless, like the Viper, they can happily carry their Antidote with their Poison; and yet we can hardly tell how to refrain from them, even in the Day of Terror and Rebuke. †

AND where there is so little Concern for the Principles of Morality, it is not to be expected that there should be much Regard for Religion. *The word of the Lord becomes a reproach, and men have no delight in it. (a)* I speak it conscientiously, and from a just Zeal in Vindication of God's Honour from the Scandal of the Irreligious, and from the Blasphemies of the Prophane; who daily dispute and ridicule every Article of the Gospel,

* *Quibus iurandum jocus, Testimonium Ludus: CICERO pro Flacco*, speaking of the Greeks, who made it, in the Decline of their Empire, a Matter of Jest and Drollery to forswear themselves, and give false Evidence,

† Roman Historians impute the Decay of their State not to Chance or Fortune, but to the Licentiousness of Mens' Lives, and the Debauchery of their Morals. And one of the greatest Captains that Rome ever had, observes, that it was impossible for any State to be happy, *stantibus manibus, ruentibus moribus*; i.e. tho' their Walls were firm, if their Morals were decay'd. *Sic si apud Aug: de civitate Dei Lib: c: 33.*
(a) Jer. vi. 10.

Gospel, and are eager and joyous over every the most minute Advantage, whereby they may expose it to the Indifference, Scorn or Aversion of Mankind: Exerting their Abilities, whether NOBLE or MEAN, in blaspheming the Saviour of the World, and overturning Religion. And is it not a melancholy Truth, too evident to be denied, that, under the specious Name of Liberty, but rather Licentiousness, such pestilent Notions are advanc'd and diffus'd, as are abhorrent to the Principles of common Sense and Reason? More Blasphemies have been publish'd against the chief Articles of our Faith in this Kingdom, and that with greater Effrontery, within these few Years last past, than have been known here for Centuries of Years before *. And what may not this produce and end in? God only knows at present; but it is well the whole Nation may not, at length, feel. *Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord, and shall not my soul be aveng'd on such a Nation as this?* †

BEHOLD the Blackness and Lowering of those Storms that are ready to break upon us, and those Earthquakes that are ready to swallow us up. See God, an incensed God, in the metaphorical Elegances of the Psalmist, *whetting and brandishing his sword, bending his bow, and preparing for us the instruments of death.* And can we not think this a Day to exhort one another, by these *Terrors of the Lord*, to do our Duty in our several Stations, that we may at least deliver our own Souls, how little soever we may contribute to the Delivering of the Nation? Can we not think this a Time to *repent and turn to God*, and do *Works meet for Repentance?* To study Works of Piety, Justice and Charity, which will *fight for us like an armed Man*; yea, better than a *mighty Shield and a strong Spear.* The Time is come that we should all of us earnestly endeavour to promote the Kingdom of CHRIST within us, that He may vouchsafe to defend the present excellent Establishment of our Kingdom now, and transmit it glorious and happy to our Posterity for ever.

To conclude: Let us all join with Heart and Mouth in the Service of G O D ; and with united Hearts and Hands, with Zeal and Unanimity,

* Josephus tells us, that God would not suffer the *Jews* to speak Evil of other Gods, tho' they were to destroy those who tempted them to the Worship of them.

nimity, in the Defence of our Gracious K I N G, and his envied Kingdoms, against the strongest Powers of *His* and *Our* Enemies. Let us send up our Prayers and Supplications to the Divine Majesty, to avert those Judgments we have justly deserv'd ; to continue his distinguishing Mercies to us ; to perpetuate the Protestant Religion among us ; and to derive his Blessing upon our Fleets and Armies. Let us, finally, beseech the God of all Consolation to behold, with tender Pity, all those who have suffer'd by the late dreadful Calamities ; and to render us fit Objects of his Mercy and Preservation, by cleansing us from all our Sins, and making us a Wise and a Religious People.

AND thus, when the whole Kingdom is reform'd, may it be one general Habitation of Piety towards G O D, of Loyalty and Obedience towards the K I N G, of Justice and Integrity towards Men, and of Sobriety, and Peace, and Unity among all the Inhabitants, 'till not Cities and Countries only, but the World, and Time itself, shall be no more.

Which God, of his infinite Mercy, grant, &c.

The E N D.

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E R R A T A.

IN Page 7, Line 13, for *abstruseſt*, read *abſtruder*.

Page 7, Line 29, from the Words, *govern it*, read, *and to alter or ſuspend the general Laws of it, ſo as ſhall be moft ſubſervient to his All-wise Purpoſes.*

Page 7, Line 31, for *rationaſe*, read *rational*.

Page 9, Line 28, after the Words, *high Degree of Provocation*, read, *when only personal*.

Page 12, in the ſecond Note after the laſt Word, *decay'd*.----

SCIPIO apud Aug. de Civ. Dei. L. i. c. 33.



